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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2018
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SUBJECT: TALABANI'S ANKARA VISIT STRESSES PKK, GOI-GOT
COOPERATION

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Iraqi President Talabani met on March 10 with Ambassador Crocker, S/I Satterfield, Pol-Mil Minister-Counselor Ries, and NSC Senior Director McGurk. Talabani told the Ambassador he was quite satisfied with his visit to Turkey and especially with progress on Northern Iraq. In frank talks with Turkish President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan, the Turks accepted Talabani's proposal that they send an envoy to Baghdad to meet with KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and agreed that a meeting &up north8 with Massoud Barzani could follow. Other bilateral diplomatic contacts discussed include visits by Interior Minister Bolani to Ankara and by President Gul to Iraq, as well as the eventual establishment of a permanent high-level bilateral commission. Talabani said they also agreed to reactivate the US-Iraq-Turkey trilateral mechanism. While a range of economic issues were discussed and publicly reported, Talabani said that private sessions with his Turkish counterparts dug into the longstanding points of contention between Turkey and the KRG. Separately, Talabani voiced general support for moving the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) negotiations forward and said he will not attend the upcoming Arab League summit in Damascus, though he said Prime Minister Maliki will go instead. End summary.

Frank Talk about Northern Iraq

¶2. (C) Talabani said his private conversations with Gul and Erdogan focused on the PKK and Northern Iraq. He told the Turkish president that the notion of an independent Kurdistan is not a realistic possibility given the proximity and attitudes of Iran, Syria and Turkey, citing the fact that the Kurds voted for the Iraqi Constitution to support this point. Turning to the PKK, Talabani told Gul there must be a resolution to this problem. Nobody, he said, can fairly accuse the Iraqi Kurdish leadership of backing the PKK; both he and Barzani had cooperated with the Turks against the PKK, but without results. He acknowledged that Barzani had made intemperate public remarks but argued that Barzani's record of working with the Turks was, if anything, better than his own. Gul pushed back on this, pointing to Barzani's unwillingness to concede that the PKK was a terrorist organization.

¶3. (C) Talabani proposed a joint approach to the problem of the PKK in coordination with KRG leaders. This would need to include public statements that the fight is over and the time for dialogue begun, complimented by firm private messages that the PKK must lay down its arms or be forced out. Talabani said he told Gul that this is a difficult problem that cannot be solved by military means, but rather requires a comprehensive approach including a national amnesty. Gul said he agreed but allowed that &others thought differently.8

¶4. (C) On Kirkuk, Talabani and the Turks agreed that

dialogue is paramount. Gul complimented Talabani on his recent visit to the disputed city, but requested more outreach to Iraqi Turcomen. Talabani said he supports greater Turcoman rights but criticized the Iraqi Turcoman Front (ITF) for obstructionism and inflammatory gestures like publicly laying a bouquet on Saddam Hussein's grave. He said such signals prevent the ITF from becoming a national political player, and suggested the Turks could contribute more positively on the Kirkuk issue by eschewing support for this enemy of the new Iraq.⁸ According to Talabani, Gul agreed that the ITF often behaves badly and promised to talk with the group's leaders.

¶5. (C) Talabani said that his discussions with Erdogan, first when they sat together at the banquet in his honor and later during their private meeting, were exceptionally friendly. Erdogan's observation that it is time to begin a new era in the relationship between their two countries and suggested they form a strategic partnership that would be the envy of others⁸ set the tone from the outset.

¶6. (C) In their discussion of the PKK, Talabani told Erdogan frankly that Ankara's timing in sending TNIO chief Taner to speak to the PKK immediately before the December 16 bombings had caused a major problem for the KRG leadership; in response, Erdogan blamed the Turkish General Staff, and said Taner's outreach in Iraqi Kurdistan came on Erdogan's personal orders. Erdogan expressed support for granting some PKK members amnesty, and said all political measures are on the table as long as the PKK is willing to lay down arms. Erdogan repeatedly stressed his pro-Kurdish credentials, mentioning his party's four Kurdish cabinet ministers and 70 Kurdish MPs, and saying he plans to spend \$15 billion in the Kurdish region of Turkey.

Diplomatic Next Steps

¶7. (C) Talabani and Erdogan agreed that Erdogan's foreign policy advisor Ahmet Davutoglu and Iraq advisor Murat Ozcellik should meet with KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani, probably during Barzani's expected trip to Baghdad. (Note: Nechirvan Barzani the next day said he would visit Baghdad after the Kurdish New Year, March 20. End note) The discussions in Baghdad could precede a delegation to the North to meet with Massoud Barzani. Talabani described a favorable response to his proposal that trilateral talks also be reactivated.

¶8. (C) Talabani said he thought another visit by TNIO head Emre Taner, whom he met privately, may follow. Taner wants to meet with the PKK leadership in the mountains; while Talabani could not guarantee the PKK field leadership would agree to this, Taner said alternately he could meet again with the PKK's European leadership.

Institutionalizing Iraqi-Turkish Cooperation

¶9. (C) Talabani said he and Erdogan agreed the GOT and GOI would set up a high committee, chaired by the two countries, Prime Ministers or Deputy Prime Ministers, with technical subcommittees to manage trade and other bilateral issues. Talabani professed ignorance of who would be on the Iraqi delegation but said it probably would include Minister of State for National Security Sherwan al-Wa'ili, and that while he had not discussed the Makhmur refugee camp while in Turkey, it would be a suitable topic for the trilateral committee. Separately, Talabani claimed Ankara had agreed to open two new pipelines (one for gas and one for oil), allow Iraq more water from the Tigris, link the Iraqi and Turkish electricity grids, and open a new border crossing in conjunction with the KRG. On the latter point, Talabani was pleased that the GOT's willingness to work with the KRG on opening the crossing implies a degree of recognition.

¶10. (C) Talabani encouraged the Turkish leaders not to mistake Iraqi Shia for Iranian puppets. He argued that

Grand Ayatollah Sistani opposes Iranian-style clerical rule, and that most Shia are Iraqi nationalists. Conceding that the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) is close to Tehran, he argued that ISCI courts Washington and regional actors just as actively.

Backing Washington On SFA, Damascus Summit

¶11. (C) Ambassador Crocker stressed that the upcoming negotiations on our long-term strategic relationship will be comprehensive and require both strategic and technical agreements. Washington needs a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), similar to those we have signed with dozens of other countries, to legitimize combat operations after the last UNSCR expires on December 31. The Ambassador urged 3 1 1 buy-in on this issue as a first step toward attaining broad Iraqi consensus. Talabani agreed, but had little to add other than noting his personal support for three permanent US bases in Iraq (one each in the Kurdish region, Balad, and the south). Talabani also said he will not grace the upcoming Arab League summit in Damascus, but said Prime Minister Maliki plans to attend. The Ambassador said we prefer lower-level representation; Talabani agreed to pass this message along.

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